

# **Viral** **Hepatitis**

- ***Who is at risk?***
- ***What are the symptoms?***
- ***How is it spread?***
- ***How can it be prevented?***



Washington State Department of

*Health*

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# Hepatitis A

**From feces and contaminated food.**

## ***Who is at risk?***

Children and young adults have the most risk. But you can get hepatitis A if you:

- Eat food touched by a person who has hepatitis A
- Drink water or eat shellfish contaminated by sewage

## ***What are the symptoms?***

15 to 50 days after you get the virus:

Sudden lack of energy, diarrhea, fever, nausea, stomach pain, often followed by yellow color in the white part of the eyes, yellowish skin and dark urine. Mild cases last one to two weeks, severe cases last four to six weeks. Most adults have symptoms. Most children under age three do not.

## ***How is it spread?***

The hepatitis A virus is in the feces of a person who has the disease. Any contact with feces may spread the virus. This happens when people don't wash their hands with soap and warm water after going to the toilet. It is also spread by eating uncooked food handled by a person who has this disease.

Restaurant workers and food handlers must be very careful to wash their hands and clean under their fingernails. Many food service workers now wear plastic gloves to prevent spread of the disease. People serving drinks should never touch the rims of glasses and cups.

Toddlers spread the virus during play, sharing toys and other close contact. Child care workers spread hepatitis A when they do not carefully wash their hands after changing diapers.

Travelers to countries where hepatitis A is common bring the disease home with them.

**Hepatitis A is most contagious before there are any symptoms.** There are no long term carriers.

***If you have been around a person with Hepatitis, or if you have these symptoms, call your doctor or health clinic at once.***

***Hepatitis is most contagious before there are any symptoms.***

# Hepatitis B

**From sex, blood or sharing needles.**

## ***Who is at risk?***

Anyone can be infected, but adults have the most risk, especially drug users who share IV needles and people who have unsafe sex.

## ***What are the symptoms?***

40 to 180 days after you get the virus, symptoms begin slowly: Lack of appetite, rash, stomach pain, nausea and vomiting, often followed by yellow color in the white part of the eyes and yellowish skin. Many people have no symptoms.

## ***How is it spread?***

Sex contact and sharing needles are the most common ways the virus is spread. Very tiny amounts of infected blood on needles, razor blades or devices used to pierce the skin can spread hepatitis B. An infected mother can give it to her baby at birth. About 10% of people with hepatitis B become carriers and can spread the disease for a lifetime. Long term hepatitis develops in over 10% of these people, who may be at risk for cirrhosis, liver cancer, and death.

# Hepatitis C

**From blood. Also called Non A, Non B.**

## ***Who is at risk?***

Before 1990, the highest risk was from blood transfusions. But now all blood donations in Washington are screened. People who share needles have the highest risk of getting hepatitis C.

## ***What are the symptoms?***

Lack of appetite, stomach pain, nausea and vomiting begin 40 to 180 days after contact. Many people have no symptoms.

## ***How is it spread?***

Not enough is known about this disease. It is spread by blood, mainly through sharing needles. Sex contact may play a role. The long-term (chronic) carrier rate is high for hepatitis C.

# How can Hepatitis be prevented?

## **Hepatitis A**

Pay strict attention to hand washing. Wash your hands with soap and warm water after going to the toilet or changing diapers. Wash your hands before touching food or drinks. Food service workers may want to use a new pair of disposable plastic gloves when they handle food. Timing is important for immune globulin shots that may prevent hepatitis A. Call your doctor or health department at once. There is a new vaccine for hepatitis A. Ask about it at your doctor's office or clinic.

## **Hepatitis B**

Know your sex partners — go with them for tests and learn to talk about protecting yourself from infection. Condoms can reduce the risk of getting hepatitis B. Learn the right way to use condoms and use a new latex condom every time you have sex.

Do not share IV needles, or "works."

Clean and sterilize all devices used to pierce the skin.

A vaccine is available — three shots are needed. All infants should get these shots.

## **Hepatitis C – Non A, Non B**

Follow the same steps as for hepatitis A and hepatitis B. At this time there is no vaccine.

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